

CHANCELLOR  
DAVID WILSON

**EXTERNAL  
FOCUS GROUPS  
SUMMARY REPORT**

Chancellor David  
Wilson  
External Focus Groups  
Summary Report

Dec. 15, 2006



## **Background and Purpose:**

In January 2006, shortly after David Wilson was appointed chancellor of the UW Colleges and UW-Extension, he appointed a Transition Team of 23 Colleges and Extension employees to help with his transition to becoming the first joint chancellor, effective May 1, 2006, of both institutions.

The second charge he gave the Transition Team was to...

**“Determine the structure, quantity and location of listening sessions.** These listening sessions are to help the new chancellor engage students, clients, partners and stakeholders in a meaningful conversation – a strategic dialogue – about how we can best serve their needs. These discussions should help us identify unmet needs, and determine how the UW Colleges and UW-Extension might serve those needs more effectively together. From these listening sessions, feedback will be codified in a way that shapes a shared vision, and points to new and perhaps joint programmatic initiatives for our institutions.”

## **External Focus Groups**

The Transition Team eventually recommended that the chancellor “engage in a series of focus groups with external stakeholders. “

A focus group is a qualitative research technique that allows researchers to talk to a group of people in a comfortable setting that fosters dialogue and allows participants to interact with each other to provide a range of perspectives, experiences, and insights. These focus groups were designed to explore the full range of ideas, attitudes, experiences, and opinions held by a selected sample of stakeholders on the defined topic. The findings from a focus group are often rich with information regarding a specific issue. It is important to remember, however, that the results of a focus group discussion cannot be statistically projected and may not be representative of the attitudes and experiences of the overall population. It is often said that qualitative research sacrifices reliability for increased validity. This means that although focus group findings cannot be replicated statistically as can sample surveys (high reliability), they often give researchers a more valid view in getting to the heart of issues under study (high validity).

The Transition Team recommended that external focus groups be conducted in each of the following theme areas:

- Student Access
- Wisconsin’s Agriculture Industry
- Community, Economic and Workforce Development
- Youth and K-12 Education
- Broadcasting and Media
- Health and Environment
- Serving Diverse Audiences

The purpose of these external focus groups was further described by UW-Extension and UW Colleges as the following:

- A. Identify unmet needs
  - 1) What are the needs of the participants or the interests they represent?
  - 2) How well is UW Colleges or UW-Extension meeting those needs?
  - 3) What other needs might there be in the future or what other needs might we meet in the future?

- B. Determine how the UW Colleges and UW- Extension might serve those needs more effectively.

### Overview of External Focus Group Methodology

This report highlights the findings from 15 focus group sessions. A summary of the 2006 dates and locations are described below.

<b>Stakeholder Group/Topic</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>
Broadcasting and Media	July 27	Madison
Serving Diverse Audiences	August 24	Hayward
Health and the Environment	August 24	Hayward
Community, Economic and Workforce Development	September 14	Eau Claire
Agriculture	September 14	Eau Claire
Student Access	October 2	Janesville
Youth Development and K-12	October 2	Janesville
Student Access	October 3	Wausau
Youth Development and K-12	October 3	Wausau
Community, Economic and Workforce Development	October 16	Menasha
Serving Diverse Audiences	October 17	Madison
Serving Diverse Audiences	November 1	Milwaukee
Community, Economic and Workforce Development	November 1	Milwaukee
Agriculture	November 7	West Bend
Health and the Environment	November 7	West Bend

The focus group coordinators from UW-Extension and UW Colleges extensively solicited names of possible participants from Colleges campuses and Extension divisions. Lists of possible participants were then developed around each topic and its location, and a recruiter called possible participants and invited them to attend a session. When people responded that they could attend, they then received a formal letter with all details and a reminder phone call the day before the focus group.

A total of 143 people participated for an average participation of nine people per group. The coordinators and recruiter always strove to have 10-12 people commit to participate as usually there were a few no-shows.

Usually 25-40 people had to be called and invited to end up with a list of 10-12 committed participants, so several hundred people learned of the focus groups and the chancellor's efforts to connect with them even if they couldn't attend.

The external focus groups were formally conducted by a professional focus group moderator and taped. Additionally, a person was always present to take extensive notes. The moderator worked off a set list of questions, driven by the purposes stated above. After 90 minutes of focus group discussion between the moderator and the participants and a break, the chancellor would address the group for a few minutes and ask a few questions of his own. This interaction usually lasted an additional 30 minutes.

### **Demographics of External Focus Group Participants**

At the end of each session, participants were asked to anonymously fill out and turn in a form that asked for demographic information. In two sessions the forms were forgotten, in which case they were sent to people afterwards with a letter asking them to fill it out and return it in a provided postage-paid envelope. The resulting demographics are as follows:

<b>Gender</b>	Male	55	43%
	Female	72	57%
<b>Age</b>	<21 years old	14	11%
	22-29	11	9%
	30-39	18	14%
	40-49	30	24%
	50+	53	42%
<b>Household income</b>	< \$ 25,000	15	13%
	\$ 25,000-49,999	19	17%
	\$ 50,000-74,999	26	23%
	\$ 75,000-99,999	19	17%
	> \$ 100,000	35	30%
<b>Educational Level</b>	High School diploma	8	7%
	Some college	26	22%
	Associate degree	6	5%
	Bachelor's degree	34	28%
	Graduate degree	46	38%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White/Caucasian	91	73%
	Asian or Pacific Islander	5	4%
	American Indian	8	6%
	Latino/Hispanic	7	6%
	African-American	12	10%
	Prefer not to answer	1	1%

## Other Efforts at Soliciting Input

### *Internal Listening Sessions with Employees*

In addition to scheduling special focus groups with these external audiences, the Transition Team recommended that “the new chancellor should also take advantage of scheduled meetings and events to engage in structured discussions (not necessarily formal focus groups) with internal audiences...” Possible internal groups to meet with included:

- Deans and Directors
- Academic Department Chairs
- Faculty and Academic Staff Governance Groups
- Boards of Visitors
- Foundations and Friends Groups
- Retirees
- Senior Staff

Chancellor Wilson then went on to conduct twelve specific listening sessions with internal Colleges and Extension employees between August and December 2006 at times when they were already gathered for meetings. The chancellor personally conducted these sessions because he wanted to interact with employees more directly. The chancellor typically asked questions about their positive expectations related to integration matters and their concerns. Since the chancellor personally conducted these sessions, they were not labeled as formal focus groups nor were they taped. A note taker was always present.

These groups included deans, directors, governance people, university relations staff, student services staff, librarians, academic staff groups, continuing education partners, and many other faculty and staff. Most were held in Madison since this was the location where these employee groups from around the state were already meeting. Sessions were also held in Fond du Lac and Wausau.

Over 200 employees interacted with him in person in these specific listening sessions. In addition to these sessions, the chancellor interacted informally and gathered insights from his many conversations with employees when he visited 31 UW-Extension county offices and 12 UW Colleges campuses during his first seven months in office.

The results of these internal listening sessions are in a separate report “*Chancellor David Wilson Internal Listening Sessions Summary Report*,” which can be found on his website [www.uwex.uwc.edu](http://www.uwex.uwc.edu) after Jan. 1, 2007.

### *Website Feedback Form*

In addition to the specific listening sessions and the exchanges employees had at Extension county offices and Colleges campuses with the chancellor, a feedback form was also posted on

the chancellor's website to ensure that as broad an audience as possible could have an opportunity for input. That website was communicated to employees several times via email and an electronic newsletter in addition to administrators encouraging employees to fill it out. By the time of this report, almost 200 people had filled out and submitted comments via this method. Those comments are also summarized in the "*Chancellor David Wilson Internal Listening Sessions Summary Report*," which can be found on his website [www.uwex.uwc.edu](http://www.uwex.uwc.edu) after Jan. 1, 2007.

### **Analysis of Data for External Focus Groups**

The analysis of these focus groups was an iterative process. Information was drawn from notes taken by an employee from the UW Colleges or UW-Extension. Attendees' comments were extracted from the notes and grouped into major themes based on content analysis.

Verbatim comments from the focus group participants are included in the report to further illustrate a theme or summary point. Comments appear in italics and are verbatim unless noted by [brackets], which indicate paraphrasing for clarity. No attempt has been made to correct grammar.

## Executive Summary of Key Themes

### I. Strengths

#### 1. UW Colleges

- Academic Quality. The UW Colleges offers rigorous, demanding coursework that prepares students to continue their education or to enter the job market.
- Personal Attention. The small class sizes and opportunities for close relationships with professors and other learning support staff are seen as a positive attribute.
- Access. Many participants view the UW Colleges as fulfilling a vital need by providing access to higher education for students who otherwise might not be able to pursue their educational goals.

#### 2. UW-Extension

- Collaborations and Partnerships. The ability and willingness of UW-Extension to help solve community problems by brokering partnerships and playing a collaborative role is seen as a strength.
- Connection to Resources. UW-Extension is viewed as playing a role in connecting individuals or agencies to resources within the university system. It also serves as the source for networking with local, regional and statewide experts.
- Evidenced-based research. The access to university research and the ability of UW-Extension to communicate and disseminate research results are strengths. This unbiased, scientific-based research is viewed as superior to other sources of information.

### II. Opportunity for Improvement

#### 1. Increase Awareness

- The lack of awareness by potential users of both the UW Colleges and UW-Extension and what they all have to offer was a theme that emerged in all focus groups.
- Individuals might be very aware of a particular service from UW-Extension, but in general they are not familiar with the breadth of the services and resources of this statewide institution.
- Similarly, many participants felt that the UW Colleges is one of the “best kept secrets.” More parents, educators and working adults need to know about the higher education options available. In addition, employers are unaware of how to access the knowledge, research and expertise of the UW Colleges’ faculty.

#### 2. Economic Development

- Participants want the assistance of the university to develop and grow local economies.
- Education can play a key role in economic development through training and retraining of the workforce. Higher education opportunities also help employers recruit and retain their workforce.
- Business leaders felt that the university should be proactive in developing relationships with and listening to the needs of the business community.
- In many sessions, participants felt that entrepreneurship will play an increasingly larger role in local economies. The entrepreneurs will need the skills, leadership and resources that the UW Colleges and UW-Extension can provide.

### **3. Serving Diverse Audiences**

- The UW Colleges and UW-Extension should strive to meet the needs of the diverse, statewide population. This statewide population is becoming increasingly more diverse in terms of racial-ethnic diversity, geographic diversity (e.g. place bound students, rural vs. urban), income disparity and access to higher education resources.

### **4. Access to Higher Education**

- Increase access to baccalaureate degrees. Consider the needs of the local area and develop creative programs such as degree completion programs, certificate programs, and courses that can be completed in fewer than 16 weeks.
- Expand or develop more collaborations with UW four-year institutions
- Focus on the needs of the potential students in terms of creative course delivery options using technology or convenient off-campus locations, convenient scheduling, flexibility and student services (e.g. extended hours for advising, Registrar's offices, etc.).

## **III. Emerging Themes**

### **1. Access/Affordability of Higher Education**

- Many participants expressed concern about the rising cost of college tuition and the impact of costs on economically depressed populations.
- Higher education is viewed as a path to individual and statewide prosperity. Participants felt that the university needs to work to educate all of the state's population. Access to higher education should not be hindered by geography, race, age, or income.

### **2. Resource Issue**

- Many participants recognized that the UW Colleges and UW-Extension are in a difficult funding cycle, where more services are needed but state funding does not keep pace. For example, UW-Extension county offices are perceived as being under-funded, under-staffed and over-worked.

### **3. Social Issues**

- The mental health and social needs of children and how that will impact the state and its higher education institutions was a key theme expressed among youth workers, educators, and business people.
- Social issues identified in both rural and urban areas that are a challenge include poverty; homelessness; access to health care (including dental and mental health care); teen pregnancy; violence and gangs, and alcohol and other drug use.
- The low high school graduation rate in both rural and urban areas is also an impediment to higher education.

### **4. Statewide Demographic Changes**

- Many participants recognized that the demographic shifts in the state are changing communities and will impact social services, health care, workforce development and higher education. Some of the changes discussed include the aging of the population, a more racially and ethnically diverse population and an increase in non-English speakers.

## Audience/Theme: Student Access

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### I. Strengths of UW Colleges

#### 1. Academic Rigor and Preparation, including Transfer Opportunities

Students at UW-Rock County in Janesville and UW-Marathon County in Wausau, where both focus groups were conducted, praised the quality of the academics. Students felt the courses were challenging and rigorous—even more challenging than most 4-year schools. Most students were aware of the transfer options available and felt that the transferability of credits was a definite advantage.

- “If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere.”  
– Student, UW-Marathon County
- “It has a great transfer program, which is important. From here you can go anywhere.”  
– Student, UW-Marathon County

Many students mentioned that the quality of the academics would give them the preparation necessary to succeed in future academic or professional endeavors.

- “This school is a really good stepping stone.”  
– Student, UW-Marathon County
- “The UW four-year schools know that students who come from the UW two-year schools have gone through the wringer and are well-prepared.”  
– Student, UW-Marathon County

#### 2. Personal Attention

Most students felt that it was an asset to have small classes and personal attention from professors. The difficulty of the classes seemed to be balanced by the student-professor ratio and the academic resources available at the UW Colleges. For many students when it was time to decide where to go to college, it seems that the prospect of a larger campus was intimidating.

- “I think I would have been terrified there [at a larger school]. Here I got really involved and it helped me to learn to study and gave me courage to talk to my professors.”  
– Student, UW-Marathon County
- “Small classes allowed me to get to know my professors.”  
– Student, UW-Marathon County
- “You’re not just a number. Teachers know your name and their doors are open. ...you feel like you’re going to see a mentor, not just a teacher.”  
– Student, UW-Rock County

## Audience/Theme: Student Access (continued)

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### 3. Affordability

Nearly all students mentioned that the affordability of the UW Colleges was a major reason that they are able to enroll in college at all. Many students are working full or part-time and have family responsibilities, so the reasonable tuition is an important reason they are able to pursue a college degree.

- “It is more affordable than a four-year school, but it’s the same quality education.”  
– *Student, UW-Rock County*
- “When my friends said they were going [away to college], I just tell them how much money I’m saving by going to UWMC.”  
– *Student, UW-Marathon County*
- “Tuition is the biggest factor [in deciding to enroll at UWMC]. Not a lot of financial aid is available to the middle class, and I didn’t want to take out loans.”  
– *Student, UW-Marathon County*

### 4. Location

Location was one of the reasons that many of the students decided to enroll in the UW-Colleges. The proximity of the campus to home or work made it possible for many students to attend college. Many students have family commitments or could not manage the financial demands of moving away to attend college.

### 5. School Spirit/Community

Fostering a sense of school spirit is very important to some students, and for many students the UW Colleges have met their expectations.

- “There is a real sense of community with students, staff and professors.”  
– *Student, UW-Marathon County*
- “There’s a sense of community if you are looking for it and get involved.”  
– *Student, UW-Marathon County*

Some students, however, do not feel a sense of connection or community. A segment of students have family and career obligations that are more important to them than the idea of school spirit. They attend UW-Colleges for the education; the idea of “school spirit” is not a priority.

In addition, a few students of color indicated that they did not feel welcome in or a sense of belonging to the campus community. For instance, some students mentioned that they were singled out for playing loud music, dancing and generally disturbing others. The students’ perception was that they were singled out due to their racial or ethnic background and their choice of music.

- “There are not too many people like me on campus. I like to talk to minorities because we have something in common. Many people here haven’t grown up around many minorities, and they look at you like you’re not even a college student.”

– Student, UW-Rock County

## Audience/Theme: Student Access (continued)

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### II. Opportunity for Improvement/Unmet Needs

#### **1. Diverse Campus Community**

Creating a welcoming campus climate for all students regardless of race/ethnicity, age and sexual orientation is an area the university could work to improve. As mentioned, some students of color did not feel a part of the campus community and felt isolated from the majority students. Students identified the need for more multicultural classes, recruitment of more faculty and staff of color and more opportunities for students of color to become involved in the campus.

- “Community is probably not the best word for students of color here, when most people who come here are from small towns. It’s hard to feel a sense of community where there isn’t a lot of diversity. But there are people who are open to diversity and want more of it.”

– Student, UW-Marathon County

#### **2. Awareness/Improve Perception**

Students wished that the UW Colleges were better known in the community, with their parents, peers, and with their high school guidance counselors. Students were very impressed with the academic quality of the school, yet some students felt they had to justify their school choice to others.

- “My Dad didn’t want me to come here because it wasn’t the full college experience. But, he has changed his mind now.”

– Student, UW-Rock County

- “Need to change the stereotypes about our school.”

– Student, UW-Rock County

- “You get made fun of for going to U-Rock.”

– Student, UW-Rock County

#### **3. Transfer of Credits**

Students thought the transfer agreements were particularly useful and a benefit of attending the UW-Colleges. Many students were quite clear in their long-term academic plans, which often included transferring to a specific four-year degree program at one of the UW institutions. Students did, however, express frustration with the current system that lacks a common course numbering or common curriculum across the UW System.

- “If we’re all part of the UW System, how do you not accept these classes....why is it so disconnected?”

– Student, UW-Rock County

#### **4. Financial Aid Process**

The financial aid process was another source of confusion and frustration for many students. One of the student focus groups was conducted three weeks into the semester, and at least two of the students in the focus group had not purchased books because they did not have their

financial aid checks. While it is unclear if the dissatisfaction with financial aid is due to student error or campus policies and procedures, the perception among students is that the campus is not doing enough to help students. (Educators and other non-students also indicated that just the process of applying for financial aid can be a barrier to people, especially families where no one has attended college before.)

## Audience/Theme: Student Access (continued)

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### **5. Advising**

Some students were dissatisfied with the quality of advising on campus. Students' frustration seems to be related to the transfer of credits and what classes will be accepted by various programs. In the course of the discussions among students, it also seems that students have various levels of expectations in terms of what academic advising should provide. Some students see advising as a resource and believe the onus is on the student to do a lot of background research. Conversely, some students are under the impression that advising is the single source for all answers related to transfer and academic planning. In any event, it seems that the expectations and roles need to be clarified and communicated.

### **III. Emerging Needs**

#### **1. Expand Access to a Baccalaureate Degree**

Many students' academic goals include graduating with a four-year degree. Students expressed interest in access to a four-year degree at the UW-Colleges. Because of work or family obligations many students indicated that leaving the area to complete a four-year degree is unrealistic. Having a Bachelor's degree option in the local area would benefit these students.

- "I'm transferring to Eau Claire. I'll be living there during the week and coming back to Wausau on the weekends. It is the only way I can finish my degree."  
– *Student, UW-Marathon County*
- "For returning adult students, it would be easier if the degree was here."  
– *Student, UW-Rock County*
- "It would be nice to have more than four Bachelor's degrees offered here."  
– *Student, UW-Marathon County*

#### **2. Prepare for a more diverse student body**

As previously mentioned, students talked about improving the climate for all students. When asked about emerging trends, students again reiterated the importance of the university being a welcoming environment for all students. Students in the Janesville group also mentioned recruiting and retaining faculty of color.

## Audience/Theme: Broadcasting and Media

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### I. Strengths

#### 1. Quality Content

Participants in a Madison focus group believe Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) and Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) programming to be accurate, trustworthy and credible. In addition, the educational content and lack of commercials sets WPT and WPR apart from other TV or radio options. Also, the content is appropriate for the entire family.

- “It stays current. It responds to what is happening in our culture--- not pop culture, but very contemporary themes.”
- “...WPT and WPR are distinctly different from all other choices on the dial. Leafing through the other channels, it [WPT/WPR] is more intellectually curious. I feel it is more engaging programming.”
- “The educational aspect of the programming is amplified through the content on the website.”
- “If you have kids at home you’re very conscious of the media environment. You can go to public TV and the feel of it is a less distilled pop culture without exposing kids to all the commercials.”

#### 2. Access to Information

WPR and WPT bring the quality content to residents (and sometimes non-residents) who might not otherwise have access to that type of quality educational programming.

- “[WPT and WPR] is a gem that we have here as residents of Wisconsin. We should be very proud that we possess a phenomenal public broadcasting system here. It is trying to provide everyone with a little something. It is trying to present the Wisconsin Idea.”
- “The word ‘public’ is key. It is their TV stations and radio stations. Unless you’re a stockholder in a particular media company, you have no say in what those commercial stations put on the air. Public TV and radio is an equalizing factor for many people who can’t go to a concert or football game.”
- “Many communities don’t have access to cable channels and many communities have narrow choices that push national programming. WPT/WPR give more variety to the public.”

#### 3. Tradition

For many listeners and viewers WPR and WPT become part of their lives and are woven into the rhythm of their day. Perhaps this is why changes in programming are met with strong reactions.

- “The consistency of programming provides a structure for the listening experience. ...It becomes part of your life.”

- “With children at home, we build our time around children’s programs on WPT.”

## **Audience/Theme: Broadcasting and Media (continued)**

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### **II. Opportunity for Improvement/Unmet Needs**

#### **1. Awareness**

Many participants felt that there is a need to increase the awareness of broadcasting options offered by WPT and WPR. Once the Chancellor provided an overview of UW-Extension and the UW Colleges, participants echoed this sentiment even more strongly, as many were unaware of the full array of resources, programs and services within the two institutions.

- “Poor marketing. I did not know all about WPT until I got on the *Friends* board. More people would contribute more if they were somehow engaged. ...You need to reach out more.”
- “[WPT/WPR] seems invisible. They need to be out promoting what they offer.”
- “Need to attract more people and share the news with people who aren’t currently watching or listening.”
- “I had no idea Extension offered on-line courses.”

#### **2. Connection between Wisconsin’s public broadcasting networks and the state’s university**

Participants felt that the connection between public broadcasting and the university was a distinct advantage in terms of providing credible content and a source of expertise on a variety of topics. Many felt that the relationship could be enhanced. For instance, more outreach to students, who could become devoted listeners and donors. Some suggested broadcasting more classes either for teachers to use in classrooms or for the use and knowledge of the general population. Another idea was to have non-credit outreach based on the personalities and topics on WPR.

#### **3. Ideas about UW Colleges and UW-Extension Integration**

The mission and purpose of both UW-Extension and the UW Colleges was briefly explained to participants and then participants were asked about their ideas as to how the two institutions could work together. Ideas included using the broadcasting system to distribute content from UW-Extension or the UW Colleges.

- “Having a program like ‘ask your agent’ to inform people about the campuses. Use the airwaves to promote what is happening in Wisconsin for Wisconsin people.”
- “Utilize information from Extension agents more effectively through TV and radio to reach more people. I am amazed at the news releases we get from the local cooperative extension agents. It seems like all this experience and information should be used more.”
- “Perhaps use mini-programs like *Earth and Sky*...a two-minute program that comes on at a specific time of day, embedded in the programming that surrounds it.”

Note: Two issues emerged from the focus groups that WPT/WPR may wish to explore more fully. First, participants mentioned the increase in the number of ‘sponsorship’ spots on public radio. There was disagreement among participants whether that was fitting for public radio. Secondly, some participants talked about what they believed to be increasing pressure on public radio to broadcast certain political viewpoints. While this focus group was not intended to explore the topic of “fair and balanced” reporting, it did appear that it was a topic on the minds of participants.

## Audience/Theme: Youth and K-12

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### I. What is important to this group when looking for expertise or resources to help guide practice

#### 1. Research-Based

Participants, who included educators and youth workers in Janesville and Wausau, want information or resources that are grounded in research, but can be transferable to practice areas. For instance, some participants mentioned that they wanted to tap into university research that could help them in their service to youth. In this era of limited resources, practitioners and educators want to be aware of the scholarly research taking place at the university that could help them improve their practice or programmatic area.

#### 2. Accessible

Programs, courses or other resources must be made available for audiences who may not be able to access courses or other content in a traditional format or at the university location. For example, people who are working will require courses or training that is offered in flexible formats and delivery methods. Some participants who worked with families in Milwaukee pointed out that transportation to a UW campus or Extension office was a barrier for many people.

- “Our employees need access to a wide variety of coursework, but they have to balance how long it can take to work on degree [time to degree] with other things.”

– *Participant, Wausau*

- “You need to take the programs to the kids, not make the kids come to the program.”

– *Participant, Janesville*

#### 3. Sustainable

It is important that content and resources remain useful and relevant over time. Several individuals expressed the need for a credible and trusted source for educational content that will remain practical through job changes or technological shifts. Some expressed the idea that it was not enough to teach students a discrete and fixed knowledge base; rather, teaching students how to be continuous learners and critical thinkers was more valuable.

- “The ability to transfer what I learn from one area to another [is important].”

– *Participant, Wausau*

### II. Strengths

#### 1. Perception of the UW Colleges: Academic Rigor and Preparation

Participants, including school administrators and teachers, feel that the UW Colleges are academically very strong and provide an excellent academic foundation for students.

- “The feedback from students who attend UWMC is that the rigor of this school is very good. Students say they have an easier time at the four-year schools than at UWMC.”

– *Participant, Wausau*

- “We encourage our students to come here. They get good preparation here.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*

## **Audience/Theme: Youth and K-12 (continued)**

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### **2. Perception of the UW-Extension: A Community Resource**

When asked about UW-Extension, most participants identified the community resources available at the Extension offices as a key strength. In addition, some individuals are aware that Extension is more than just the county office, and that it is a means to access university resources such as academic research to help guide programmatic decision-making.

- “UW-Extension is a wealth of resources for the community. With the evidence-based programs, we don’t need to start over.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- “[UW-Extension’s] grand mission is to bring learning to the citizens. It has its roots in helping farmers, but the diversity of the mission has expanded tremendously...it is lifelong learning.”  
– *Participant, Janesville*
- “Extension has a lot of resources that they can tap into...and they have a close local connection.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*

### **3. Perception of 4-H: A Youth Development Model**

The 4-H program is viewed as having an extremely positive impact on youth. The program is perceived favorably and its outcomes are seen as developing leadership skills and providing an opportunity for youth to become involved in their communities.

- “4-H has the strongest model for youth development. We need to encourage that model in the community more. Often people are trying to reinvent the wheel and the 4-H model already works.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- “4-H is not just for rural or farming communities. It helps to develop life skills.”  
– *Participant, Janesville*
- “4-H is a strength-based youth development program. It completely empowers youth to drive the program. It’s giving young people the tools they need to develop leadership skills. People think 4-H is just activities, crafts.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*

Many participants in this group realize that 4-H is more than just agriculture. Some participants point out that in order to continue to build a strong agriculture base in the state, 4-H needs to stay close to its agricultural roots, while still reaching urban and rural youth. Some educators in

the group note that they see very little outreach or promotional materials at their school and wonder how 4-H is working to build awareness of the program to students.

## Audience/Theme: Youth and K-12 (continued)

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### Opportunity for Improvement/Unmet Needs

#### **1. Serving diverse audiences**

Participants feel that providing higher education and lifelong learning opportunities for all types of learners is an area that could be improved. For example, participants identified non-traditional-aged students, students who are employed and going to school part-time, and students of color as examples of groups that could be better served by the UW Colleges and UW-Extension. Distance education and flexible scheduling were identified as key components of serving students who have family and work commitments.

In Wausau, participants indicated that potential students in the Hmong community might have a difficult time accessing learning opportunities offered by the UW Colleges or UW-Extension. Potential barriers that may prevent Hmong students from enrolling in the UW Colleges include work commitments and a general lack of knowledge of the college selection process. In addition, the complexity of the financial aid process may be a barrier not only to Hmong students, but also to first generation college students and other students who don't have the resources to navigate the financial aid process.

- “We have a two-year campus just 15 minutes away, and a tech school right in our community, but the programming is all at the same time...somehow we need to broaden the scheduling of that coursework.”  
– *Participant, Janesville*
- “UW is slow in cranking up to the needs of new learners...such as those with families. You [UW] have to keep on track with what you offer and when you offer [programs]. Other [competitors] are offering things in other ways.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- “I wonder if sometimes 4-H might look at some of the programs to see if they are culturally competent enough to recruit students of color.”  
– *Participant, Janesville*

#### **2. Expand Four-Year Degree Options**

In addition to serving the needs of a diverse student body, participants identified the need to expand access to four-year degrees at the UW Colleges. Participants felt that more baccalaureate degree options would help with economic development in terms of recruiting and retaining employees. Mindful of diminishing and stretched resources, participants were in favor of collaborations and partnerships with four-year institutions. In terms of academic program area, participants suggested identifying workforce areas projected to have a worker shortage (e.g. health care). Additionally, some individuals suggested there was a need for more degree completion opportunities for people who have earned some college credits or a degree from a technical college.

- “Keep the partnership with the four-year schools so you're not duplicating resources. It allows place bound students to get a degree. It allows us to keep good people in the community. The collaborations with UWSP and others to bring the degree here...without you necessarily providing the degree.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*

## Audience/Theme: Youth and K-12 (continued)

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### 3. Awareness

Almost all participants indicated a low level of awareness about the resources and programs that UW-Extension offers. While participants realize that UW-Extension has a wealth of resources and they identify that attribute as a positive feature, most participants admit they are not as informed as they would like to be.

- “I’m embarrassed that I don’t know more about Extension programs.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- “I am on the county board, which helps to fund Extension, and I’m not that aware of what Extension has to offer.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- “We’re a pretty well-informed group of people and we don’t know much about Extension. They need to create more awareness of the resources they have to offer us.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*

Similarly, while participants have very strong, positive impressions about the UW Colleges, they identify a need to increase awareness and visibility of the campus.

- “I’d like to see more PR and media to our families so they understand that UWMC is an option.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- “[UW Colleges] could do a better job of articulating transfer options. I am not sure how well that is known among kids going off to college.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- “A lot of our parents aren’t aware of the UW Colleges system.”  
– *Participant, Janesville*

### 4. Economic Development

Focus group participants recognized the role that UW-Extension and the UW Colleges could play in economic development. For example, participants in both sessions identified “brain drain” as a serious educational issue that impacts local and statewide economic development. In addition, as the economy shifts and companies leave the area or layoff employees, participants identified the need to have educational options for displaced employees.

- “As we move to more tech and services industries, how do we train and re-train the workforce? They [employees] need access to education...what UW-Extension has done for 100 years through 72 offices and the 13 campuses...”  
– *Participant, Janesville*
- “We [businesses] reach out to the UW but don’t always feel they reach out to us.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- “There need to be more conversations about how to keep our students in this state. Minnesota and Chicago lure our [college] graduates.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*

## Audience/Theme: Youth and K-12 (continued)

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### IV. Emerging Issues

#### 1. Access and Affordability

When respondents were asked about the future needs of Wisconsin's youth and its youth workers, participants identified access and affordability of post-secondary options as key issues. Many participants expressed concern about the rising costs of college tuition and the impact that has for making post-secondary options available to all students. Affordable tuition at the UW Colleges was perceived as a strength and an important higher education "access point." Many individuals made the connection between an educated workforce and the economic vitality of their region and the state as a whole.

- "If students start but don't stay and get the degree, they lose out on huge earning potential."  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- "We need to make education and training affordable and accessible."  
– *Participant, Janesville*
- "We can't afford not to educate everyone. We don't have a large enough workforce to sustain ourselves."  
– *Participant, Wausau*

#### 2. Serve Diverse Audiences

The ability to serve diverse audiences was an issue that was frequently mentioned by respondents as an emerging issue for all educators and youth workers. Participants observed that the demographic composition of the state/region is changing and educators and youth workers at all levels need to be prepared to serve a more diverse population.

- "Diversity will become so important. Any lack of openness to diversity should be viewed as a real handicap."  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- "[Future college students] are more likely to be immigrant, learning the English language and more likely to be from a different culture from their professor. I think there needs to be a focus on multiculturalism."  
– *Participant, Janesville*
- "There is an increasing need for tolerance and for diversity especially as we prepare future teachers to work with future students."  
– *Participant, Wausau*

## **Audience/Theme: Youth and K-12 (continued)**

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### **3. Social/Emotional Needs of Children**

Focusing on the social and emotional needs of children was a theme echoed in both focus groups. The participants in the Janesville group spent more time on this topic. {Editor's Note: The school shooting near Cazenovia took place only four days prior to our focus group}. The issue most frequently mentioned was that educators and school administrators are dealing more and more with youth who have non-academic problems. Educators and youth workers alike both identified the need for more education and training in the social and emotional needs of youth.

- “As we are preparing professionals to work with youth, we need to emphasize social and emotional needs of youth. [We] need that content expertise.”  
– *Participant, Janesville*

## Audience/Theme: Health and the Environment

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### I. What is important to this group when looking for expertise or resources to help guide practice

#### **1. Unbiased Research and Information**

The participants, who ranged from health care/hospital CEOs to social workers to non-profit leaders to environmentalists from across northern Wisconsin and the West Bend area, all agreed that having access to unbiased research and information is extremely important to their work. Participants want to rely on a trusted source of information and have confidence in the scientific integrity of any research or data.

### II. Strengths

#### **1. Perception of the UW-Extension: Collaborations and Connections**

Virtually all participants indicated that they had used a program or service offering from UW-Extension. When asked to describe their work with UW-Extension, the words “collaboration” or “connection” were frequently mentioned. UW-Extension’s rich resources and willingness to collaborate on local health care or environmental issues was seen as a strength of the organization.

- “Extension is a great collaborative partner in educational programs.”  
– *Participant, Hayward*
- “Extension is a bridge between the university and the community.”  
– *Participant, West Bend*
- “Extension has a lot of connections, and they have the networks you can use....”  
– *Participant, Hayward*

### III. Opportunity for Improvement/Unmet Needs

#### **1. Awareness**

Almost all participants indicated a low level of awareness about the vast array of resources and programs that UW-Extension offers. While participants are extremely familiar and have overwhelming positive perceptions of the local Extension agents, most participants did not realize the scope of the entire organization and its array of programs and services. Representatives from the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa tribal nation attended the session in Hayward, and although they expressed appreciation for all the good work that Extension was doing with tribal peoples, they felt that Extension could do more to build awareness among Native people.

- “Not enough is known about Extension and what they have to offer. It is not appreciated.”  
– *Participant, Hayward*
- “From a tribal perspective, there needs to be more awareness of what Extension is, where their offices are and what they do and how to access them.”  
– *Participant, Hayward*

## Audience/Theme: Health and the Environment (continued)

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### 2. Resources

Among the participants who dealt with the local Extension offices, many believe that shortage of resources for Extension was a challenge for the agents and the communities they serve. For instance, many participants stated that the county offices were understaffed for the amount of work needed in the local area. Participants cited examples of particular agents they knew who worked long hours and did not have assistants or other staff to assist with the workload. Some individuals talked about agents not having the resources for their own professional development activities or travel. Another problem cited was staff turnover. Some participants speculated that enormous workload might be a cause of high staff turnover.

- “Extension staff is really overextended. When you’re good, there is an increased demand for your services. It’s amazing what they get done. They are very dedicated.”  
– *Participant, Hayward*
- “[An] issue that is hardest to overcome is that Extension has high staff turnover. When an Extension person leaves, they take with them lots of links and connections.”  
– *Participant, Hayward*
- “We need to do a better job of educating our elected officials about the importance of Extension and what it brings to so many people’s lives.”  
– *Participant, Hayward*

## IV. Emerging Issues

### 1. Workforce/Education Issues

Participants, particularly those who represented the health care industry, indicated that workforce shortages (especially nurses, pharmacists, and physical therapists) are the biggest challenge as they look toward the future. Problems identified include recruitment, retention, training and re-training of the workforce. Participants in the Hayward group commented that there was a lack of educational options for people who wanted to remain in the area and continue their education.

They also noted that even when professionals do come to the area to work, they can be disappointed with the quality of local school systems and leave in search of better schools for their children. One participant noted that counties heavily invest in keeping roads in excellent shape to meet needs of tourists, which are the lifeblood of the economy, but this means lower funding for schools.

### 2. Keeping the North, the North (Hayward Group)

Participants spent some time discussing the complex relationship between tourism and the environment. Participants noted that tourism is the economic lifeblood of the region. And tourism is dependent on having a strong and vital environment. An increasing number of people using the lakes, rivers and trails for vacation and recreation take its toll on the environment. Participants wrestled with this issue and wondered if the university could help find a balance.

- “The environment is what makes the North so special. We lose our young people because we don’t have industry, but we keep our environment because we don’t have industry.”

– *Participant, Hayward*

## **Audience/Theme: Health and the Environment (continued)**

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- “Everything north of Hwy 8 is dependent on lakes and rivers. We need to protect them. If lakes and rivers die, then northern Wisconsin dies. Extension has a very important role to play in educating people how they use lakes and rivers.”

– *Participant, Hayward*

Participants also spent some time in the session discussing how individuals (residents and tourists) impact the environment by their personal choices such as transportation and recreation. Some other environmental issues mentioned include climate change, invasive species and sustainable energy needs.

### **3. Social Issues**

Participants in both groups identified a number of social issues that are macro-level problems. Some key issues discussed include access to health care (including dental and mental health), alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) issues, poverty, homelessness, declining high school graduation rates, teenage pregnancy, and gang activity. In short, rural and urban areas have similar social problems. Some individuals in the Hayward group pointed out that dealing with social issues in a rural area has the additional burden of lack of resources. Many participants perceived that urban areas such as Madison and Milwaukee had more resources and more agencies to deal with social issues.

- “Substance abuse and addictions are a huge problem. 16,500 people live in Sawyer County, but on a given day there might be 100,000 visitors in the county. Tourists, hunters, and others engage in substance abuse, but so does the local population.”

– *Participant,  
Hayward*

Participants felt that UW-Extension could continue to play on its strengths of building partnership and connections to help solve some of the “Northern Wisconsin Issues.”

- “You need strong partnerships to try to battle some of these huge issues that no one entity can deal with.”

– *Participant, Hayward*

### **4. Organization of UW-Extension & UW Colleges**

Participants were encouraged to consider how UW-Extension and the UW Colleges could improve their services to the state. One or two individuals questioned if the current structure with 72 county offices was the best way to serve the state. Some argued that with technology and the fast pace of information exchange, the county model was obsolete. An equal number of participants, however, believed that the local connection was crucial for serving the people. In addition, some wondered how an organizational change (say to a regional service area) would work given the current funding models.

(Editor's Note: We heard this idea emerge in two other focus groups: agriculture, and community and economic development. There was not a consensus in any focus group as to whether changing the existing county-model was a good idea or not.)

## Audience/Theme: Agriculture

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### I. What is important to this group when looking for expertise or resources to help guide practice

#### **1. Unbiased Research and Information**

The participants, who included farmers of small and large operations and others working in the agriculture industry from the Eau Claire and West Bend areas, also identified the need for resources and expertise to be grounded in science and academic research. Participants are looking for information that is unbiased and from a trusted source. Many individuals told stories of crop consultants or pharmaceutical representatives providing information. Due to the commercial aspect of the source, this information is not viewed as “pure” scientific research.

### II. Strengths

#### **1. Perception of the UW-Extension: Access to Resources and Research**

As mentioned, an important need of this constituent group is information and resources that will help them with their agricultural-based businesses. UW-Extension is viewed as serving that need of the agricultural community by providing unbiased information based on university research. In both groups, there seemed to be a slight negative perception of information from commercial sources such as crop consultants and companies selling vaccines and medication for animal health. The feeling among this group is that the commercial vendors are not impartial and are trying to sell their products, not necessarily help solve problems.

- “My agent is science-minded....on a lot of these issues you need replication and scientific procedures to prove data.”  
– *Participant, Eau Claire*
- “...if you have to weave your way through the [university] system, you’re talking about a major time commitment we don’t have. UW-Extension gives us access [to information] in a timely manner.”  
– *Participant, Eau Claire*
- “UW-Extension has a good reputation as an unbiased source...we need an alternative to the deluge of information from commercial sources.”  
– *Participant, Eau Claire*

### III. Opportunity for Improvement/Unmet Needs

#### **1. Resources**

Similar to other constituent groups who work closely with the local Extension agent, participants in the agricultural sessions felt that the county offices were under-staffed. One participant, who is a member of the county board, mentioned that the county board needs to hear about the importance of UW-Extension from residents because many board members are not familiar with how vital UW-Extension is to the community in general and the agriculture industry specifically.

- “They [Extension agents] are trying to do an 80 hour-a-week job on a 40% appointment.”  
– *Participant, Eau Claire*

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## Audience/Theme: Agriculture (continued)

- “Looking at funding, a great deal of money comes from urban audiences who need to be educated about the value of their investment.” - *Participant, Eau Claire*

Some participants suggested that UW-Extension deal with the resource issue by working to expand existing partnerships and explore new ones. For example, partnering with local agri-businesses, local growers, and others might be a positive step to help leverage scarce resources.

## 2. Economic Development – Serving Niche Markets

Participants suggested that UW-Extension could broaden its service options to include emerging agricultural markets such as organic farms, agri-entertainment and other small, niche farm operations. (Participants in the group represented a range of agricultural operations from large dairy farms to small berry farms). Other participants noted that emerging agricultural industries might be a way to attract more people into agriculture and a way to grow Wisconsin’s agricultural industry. In short, it seems that participants want UW-Extension to play a leadership role in identifying market potential and new opportunities for Wisconsin agriculture.

- “What is UW-Extension going to do to help the small, specialized farms?”  
– *Participant, Eau Claire*
- “Get Extension to pay more attention to emerging opportunities...currently, they focus on mature production operations. [UW-Extension] should identify those new trends coming and then get the brainpower in front of it.”  
– *Participant, Eau Claire*

## 3. Serving Diverse Audiences

The agricultural industry in Wisconsin has experienced a diversification in its workforce that lends itself to continuing education opportunities. Many individuals were able to identify diverse population segments in the agricultural community. Examples included an increase in Mennonite and Amish farmers in their area; Hmong farmers at community farmers markets; Somali workers in the Barron area; and workers from Brazil and Ecuador on large dairy farms. Participants suggested that perhaps the university has a role to play in developing education programs for the diverse communities.

- “UW-Extension might develop a program for non-native workers to help ease the transition into the community.”  
– *Participant, Eau Claire*
- “Perhaps they [UW-Extension] could publish Spanish-language materials.”  
– *Participant, West Bend*

## Audience/Theme: Agriculture (continued)

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### IV. Emerging Issues

#### **1. Workforce Issues**

As mentioned, many farming operations are relying on non-native workers for their workforce. While farmers indicated overall satisfaction with the quality of their workforce and their strong work ethic, they recognize workforce staffing will continue to be an issue and a struggle.

#### **2. Land Use Planning and the Rate of Urbanization**

In terms of macro-level issues related to agriculture, the issue of land use planning and the rate of urbanization were key concerns for participants. As the value of agricultural land increases, starting a new farm becomes cost-prohibitive and gives existing farmers a monetary incentive to sell their land. As more and more people move out to the countryside, it may create conflicts between agricultural farmers and non-farm families. As one participant stated, “Humans and dairy cows don’t mix.”

- “We’re really feeling the city bearing down on us.”

– *Participant, Eau Claire*

## Audience/Theme: Community, Workforce and Economic Development (CWE)

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### I. Strengths

#### 1. Perception of the UW Colleges

Focus groups on the topic of Community, Workforce and Economic Development were held in Milwaukee, Menasha (the Fox Valley), and Eau Claire. Participants ranged from community leaders, non-profit representatives, and business executives/managers to owners of small businesses. The perception and awareness of the UW Colleges varied. Participants in the Fox Valley group felt that UW Colleges is forging strong partnerships with other post-secondary institutions and local business to help foster the economic vitality of the area.

- “The stronger we can make our two-year campuses, the stronger our communities will be.”  
– *Participant, Fox Valley*

Note: In the other two sessions (which were conducted in Eau Claire and Milwaukee, cities with four-year institutions) the awareness of the UW Colleges was low.

#### 2. Perception of UW-Extension: Partnerships and Resources

Participants viewed UW-Extension as both a partner in local CWE development and a source of information and resources. Many of the participants were able to describe an instance in which they (or the organization they represent) had relied on information, data, reports or UW-Extension personnel to help complete a task. The amount of resources and the willingness of UW-Extension to partner with local CWE leaders is viewed as a strength.

- “UW-Extension is a wealth of resources for the community. With the evidence-based programs, we don’t need to start over.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*
- “[UW-Extension’s] grand mission is to bring learning to the citizens. It has its roots in helping farmers, but the diversity of the mission has expanded tremendously...it is lifelong learning.”  
– *Participant, Eau Claire*
- “Extension has a lot of resources that they can tap into...and they have a close local connection.”  
– *Participant, Wausau*

### II. Opportunity for Improvement/Unmet Needs

#### 1. Expand Four-Year Degree Options And Delivery Alternatives

An issue expressed in the Fox Valley group and the Milwaukee group was the need to expand access to four-year degree alternatives. Participants in the Fox Valley group felt that more baccalaureate degree options in the area would boost the economic development in terms of recruiting and retaining employees. For example, the existing degree completion program in engineering (between UW-Fox Valley and UW-Platteville) was viewed very favorably as an example of the UW Colleges meeting the needs of employers and employees in the area. Participants noted that alternative delivery methods, convenient course times, and flexibility should be built into programs serving returning adult students.

- “The Fox Valley ranks in the top 50 manufacturing areas in the U.S. If even more four-year degrees could be added, that could aid in the recruitment and retention of new companies.”
  - *Participant, Fox Valley*

## **Audience/Theme: Community, Workforce and Economic Development (continued)**

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- “Our need seems to be for employees who are already in the employment pipeline, but they want a fast-track to advance their education and careers. [UW-Extension] needs to be creative ...”
  - *Participant, Milwaukee*
- “The [UW] Colleges could work on offering classes that are both online and in the classroom..”
  - *Participant, Fox Valley*

In addition, each group spent some time discussing credit transfer policies and articulation agreements. Most participants felt that the credit transfer within the UW System and between the UW and other institutions was too complex and bureaucratic.

### **2. Outreach and Access to Resources**

While most participants were very aware that UW-Extension has a myriad of resources, some participants were unable to identify the best point of access for those resources. Adding to the confusion are the multiple entities that are working (often simultaneously) on the same CWE issue. There appears to be an opportunity for improved coordination and communication. Several participants felt that one way the “knowledge transfer” could be improved was by having professors be more accessible to the community, to entrepreneurs and to business leaders.

- “As a user, there are a huge amount of resources there...but it is almost overwhelming to know what’s there and where to start.”
  - *Participant, Eau-Claire*
- “Here in Polk County, I would have no idea how to access [university] information.”
  - *Participant, Eau-Claire*
- “I would like to see a bit more outreach...professors offering their expertise.”
  - *Participant, Fox Valley*
- “I’d like to see an avenue to the professors in the university.”
  - *Participant, Eau-Claire*

### **3. Partner with Business Community**

A consistent message heard in all three focus groups on this topic of CWE was the need for the university to partner more with the business community. It was clear that participants wanted the university to listen to the needs of the business community and industry, and to work together to develop innovative solutions. Some individuals perceive the university to be very reactive. In other words, the university may respond to issues as they develop, but does not do a good job of being proactive and taking a leadership role in CWE issues.

## Audience/Theme: Community, Workforce and Economic Development (continued)

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### III. Emerging Issues

#### 1. Access and Affordability

Access and affordability of post-secondary options was a key issue that emerged. Participants recognized that having an educated workforce is crucial to a vibrant economy. As mentioned, access to higher education was viewed as an important key to employee recruitment and retention efforts.

- “Pretty soon it will be ...only rich kids will be able to go to college.”  
– *Participant, Fox Valley*

#### 2. Entrepreneurial Climate

Looking toward the future, participants believe that entrepreneurship will become an increasingly important segment of the economy. Participants in the Fox Valley area speculate that more and more people will start their own businesses due to the recent layoffs of professional staff at Kimberly Clark, a large employer in the area. Many entrepreneurs participated in the Eau-Claire focus group and also believed that entrepreneurs are a segment that will become increasingly important to Wisconsin’s economy.

- “A mindset has to be crafted within the UW and Extension that could help with the entrepreneurial spirit.”  
– *Participant, Fox Valley*
- “We can keep rural economies vibrant by stressing entrepreneurship.”  
– *Participant, Eau-Claire*

*Note:* The Small Business Development Centers are viewed very favorably and participants (especially in Eau-Claire) were very familiar with the Wisconsin Entrepreneurs' Network (WEN). Participants felt that the level of coordination provided by WEN is a wonderful benefit. Some individuals in the Eau-Claire focus group did suggest updating the resources in the WEN toolbox and verifying the level of expertise of the providers.

#### 3. Preparing For a Diverse Workforce

At all three focus group sessions, participants mentioned that the demographic and population shifts in the state will require more focused attention towards meeting the needs of a diverse workforce. Some business leaders identified recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce as a key issue they will be facing in the future.

## Audience/Theme: Serving Diverse Audiences

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### I. Strengths

#### **1. Perception of the UW Colleges**

Focus groups on the topic of Serving Diverse Audiences were held in Hayward, Madison and Milwaukee. While this section summarizes the findings of those three focus groups on this topic, the importance and necessity of serving the needs of diverse audiences, whether young people, students or workers, came up naturally in several of the other focus groups in topical areas such as Youth and K-12, the Community, Economic and Workforce Development focus group, and Health and Environment.

About half of the respondents had no association or perception of the UW Colleges, which is perhaps not surprising since there are no campuses in Madison or Milwaukee, and the term “UW Colleges” is not advertised. The other half of the respondents were quite aware of the organization’s mission and role in providing an access point to higher education.

- “It’s a wonderful opportunity right in our backyard for young people to get their start in college and get a good footing in the four-year schools.”

– *Participant, Hayward*

#### **2. Perception of UW-Extension**

When asked about UW-Extension, individuals were able to describe the work of UW-Extension at it relates to continuing education, online education, agriculture, 4-H and the resources available through Cooperative Extension.

### II. Opportunity for Improvement/Unmet Needs

#### **1. Expand Service and Outreach to Diverse Student Populations**

After conducting three focus groups on this topic, it became clear that participants would like the UW Colleges and UW-Extension to work to improve their service and outreach to a wider audience. Examples include working more closely with the Tribal Colleges, using technology to bring credit and non-credit courses to place-bound adult students and working to help first-generation college students and non-white high school students succeed in college.

#### **2. Collaborate**

Participants expressed a desire to see an increased level of collaboration between the UW-Extension/UW Colleges and other higher educational partners such as the Tribal Colleges and the Technical Colleges. It was also suggested that the UW Colleges and UW-Extension increase awareness of their programs and services by building partnerships with key influencers such as community-based organizations, churches, pastors and area schools.

- “It would be nice if the UW came to us [the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Nation] seeking collaborations. LCO is seeking to strengthen those ties. Why isn’t it the UW that seeks to strengthen those ties?”

– *Participant, Hayward*

- “We would like to see the tech college as your partner...”

– *Participant, Madison*

**Audience/Theme: Serving Diverse Audiences**  
**(continued)**

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**3. Administrative Commitment to Diversity**

In addition, participants felt it was important for UW-Extension and the UW Colleges to focus on the recruitment and retention of its own diverse workforce. (Please note: this was also suggested in the focus group with students.) It was suggested that faculty and staff should understand and be aligned behind an organizational mission that includes diversity as a key component.

**III. Emerging Issues**

**1. Youth and K-12**

There seems to be overwhelming concern for the young people of color and their likelihood to achieve their educational goals. In all sessions participants expressed alarm at the low high school graduation rate among non-white students and what that means for the individuals and the state. While participants were not placing blame on any individual or any institution, the future of our youth was a key concern.

**2. Social Issues**

Participants identified a number of social issues that are macro-level problems (and related to concerns we heard expressed in other groups). Chief among the concerns was access to health care, jobs and job training (perhaps in the individual's native language), homelessness, and transportation to social services, which were cited as issues in both rural and urban areas.

###